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PRESENTATION
OF THE
G O L D M E D A L S,
AWARDED RESPECTIVELY TO PROFESSOR CARL RITTER AND
DR. BEKE.

THE President opened his Address in the following words:—

“ The award of the gold medal, which bears the impress of our gracious Sovereign and Patron, the Queen, to the great Prussian geographer, Carl Ritter, will be hailed by the cultivators of our science all over the globe, as the best earned tribute to merit of a high order which this Society has ever paid. If distinguished explorers of distant lands had this year come before us with fresh claims, we might have continued our usual habit of adjudicating the royal medals to such individuals; but when such men do not appear, it is incumbent on us to cast our eyes on those who, though not themselves personal explorers of distant lands, have thrown new and powerful lights on what I may term the philosophy of geography. At the very head, then, of this class of inquirers stands Carl Ritter. He was the first who laid down and admirably carried out the principle, that in order to form clearer and more instructive ideas of geography, it was above all essential to study the configuration of the great masses of land. When looking to his method of bringing out in striking relief and comparison the respective features of each country, we can indeed at once comprehend where all the great cities must have been placed, and where nature refused to admit their establishment. The whole history of mankind is, in short, a result of this principle. M. Ritter is gifted with an erudition so profound that nothing escapes his keen research, whilst his great talents, his veracity and extreme accuracy have enabled us to profit by his beautiful and compendious works, as much as if we had laboured through all the original sources of his knowledge. But in eulogising our medallist I cannot stop here. All external nature is in truth developed by him, for he makes us acquainted with the productions of the different soils and tracts; and tracing their limits with precision, he explains the reasons of such boundaries. Take, for example, his illustrations of the geography of plants; and we must all admit that his history of the distribution of the banana, the mangoe, or the *Borassus flabelliformis*, and of different species of figs, and of the Indian tamarind, as well as of the Phoenix, or common date, and of the *Mangifera*, or celebrated Eastern palm-tree, is a real masterpiece of scientific composition, and worthy of the praise of a Humboldt, a Brown,

a Wallich, or a Royle. I advert to this point among the numerous acquirements and researches of M. Ritter, because it has not perhaps as yet been sufficiently remarked upon or culled out from the mass of materials in his great work. Every subject, however, which he touches is thoroughly fathomed. If he alludes to sugar, as having been formerly cultivated at the foot of Mount Zagros in Mesopotamia, he lays before his readers such a complete history of the material as was never before presented to the public. In zoology, as in botany, he is equally happy; and camels, tigers, lions, and elephants are all treated of in the same full, satisfactory, and judicious manner.

"But, above all, the different races of the human species are, as it were, individualized and characterized with an astonishing sagacity; and whilst, in delineating their history, he transports us across immense plains or mountain chains without fatiguing our attention, he also leaves on our minds a deep and lasting impression of the configuration of every part of the globe of which he treats.

"Again, when we view him as an antiquary, his work is a rich mine, which is transfused with the essence of the most learned writings of the ancients. Guided by the physical geography of the land, the many great movements of the human race, whether under Alexander the Great, the Sultan Mahmoud, or other great conquerors, are illustrated, and followed to their extreme results, in a manner worthy of a D'Anville or a Rennell. In a word, I am sustained by the opinion of the best geographers in Europe, when I say that there is no living person to be compared to Carl Ritter, for the immense quantity of his valuable accumulations; there are few who could have arranged them in so lucid and philosophical a manner; and no one has surpassed him in zealous devotion to the great cause of the advancement of our science.

"Whilst one of our illustrious foreign members, Alexandre von Humboldt, has recently in Berlin spoken to me of Carl Ritter, as being ' unquestionably the first geographer of the age,' another, I rejoice to say, of the band of great men, in whom Prussia may well glory, my eminent friend Leopold von Buch, who is now present, has testified to me in the warmest manner his admiration of the intrinsic merits of the scientific researches and personal character of his enlightened countryman. It is indeed with a satisfaction which I want words to express, that I should be so fortunate as to occupy the chair of this Society when such an award is made, and be thus enabled to consign to the hands of the great geologist of the Continent the medal which the geographers of Britain have adjudicated to their great foreign contemporary."

Then rising and addressing Baron Leopold von Buch, the President added:—

"M. LEOPOLD VON BUCH,—In placing in your hands the gold medal of the Royal Geographical Society, decerned to your distinguished countryman, Carl Ritter, I deliver it to one who has so full a perception of his real deserts, that you cannot but feel deeply gratified to see them valued as they are by your old friends, the men of science of England. After an absence of thirty-six years, you have revisited

our shores, during which time your researches, geological and geographical (for the sciences never can be separated), have extended from the remotest parts of Scandinavia to the southernmost corners of Europe, and have shed bright rays of light on the structure of many lands, from the Alps to the Canaries. The high estimate, therefore, which *you* have formed of the labours of M. Ritter must have the greater weight with us, more especially with those who, like myself, have been honoured with your intimate acquaintance, and know how to appreciate the value of your sincere opinion, founded as it is on the careful study of the works of a contemporary worthy of yourself. Assure therefore M. Ritter, I beg of you, that in delivering to you this medal for him, I experience, as a geographer, precisely the same degree of satisfaction as when, in my former capacity of presiding over the geologists of England, I had the happiness of transmitting to you the Wollaston medal of the Geological Society; and, believe me, that by such awards both Societies feel that they have acquired real and permanent honour for themselves."

To this the Baron L. von Buch replied:—

"SIR,—The honour conferred on M. Ritter by your distinguished Society will certainly be appreciated by him as one of the most gratifying testimonials which he could have anticipated, in proof of their kind acknowledgment of his remarkable and useful labours. On his own part my friend will no doubt express his warmest thanks for this distinction; and in the mean time believe me, that I feel deeply honoured in being made the bearer of the Victoria medal to a countryman, whose warmth of heart and, I would venture to say, truly Christian character, are no less admirable than his profound learning and sound reasoning."

On the adjudication of the Founder's Medal to Dr. Beke, the President thus addressed the Society:—

"The exploratory travels of Dr. Beke through the interior of Abyssinia, accomplished by great individual exertions, under circumstances of severe privation, were so fully commented on in my discourse of last year, that all those who are desirous of seeing such zeal and ability rewarded, must have anticipated that, as soon as the results of his labours were given to the public, this Society would not be backward in tendering to him one of its Royal medals.

"In addition to the vast number of new points, the latitude and relative position of which Dr. Beke has laid down, and the construction of an original map, extending over 70,000 square miles of a country hitherto almost unknown, and never geographically surveyed, I now learn that even those surmises, which he threw out at one of our meetings, concerning the Dedhesa being the direct if not the principal source of the Bahr-el-Azrek, as derived by him from converse with the natives, have been completely realised through the subsequent explorations of M. d'Abbadie.

"But it is, after all, for the amount of fresh geographical knowledge afforded to us of a region, to which our attention was first roused by Bruce, that great pioneer of enterprising and disinterested geographers, that we award our medal; and this honour is rightly assigned to Dr. Beke, upon the very same grounds as those which have previously regu-

lated our conduct in respect to many distinguished explorers of distant countries, difficult of access, and dangerous to European life."

Then rising, and addressing Dr. Beke, the President said :—

" Dr. BEKE,—In common with all those who admire that ardour in the pursuit of fresh geographical knowledge, to attain which you have explored a large portion of Abyssinia, I have great pleasure in delivering to you this medal of our royal founder King William IV. ; and whilst I deeply regret that the limited funds of our Society did not admit of our supplying you with additional means, which would have enabled you further to enrich our archives by extending the area of your researches, I congratulate you on the success which has attended them ; and hope that, as our good opinion and our medal are all we can now offer, you will be gratified in having your name enrolled among those British geographers who have previously been distinguished like yourself."

Dr. Beke, in reply, said :—

" Sir,—It is with no ordinary feelings of pride and gratification, that I receive from this distinguished and learned Society so unequivocal a proof of their estimation and approval of the little, that I have been permitted to add to the common stock of knowledge of Eastern Africa and its inhabitants.

" I had hoped that it would have been in my power to complete the task which I had set myself in visiting Abyssinia, by laying before the public the general results of my travels and researches there. But this hope, owing to the pressure of other avocations, I am for the present reluctantly compelled to abandon ; and a considerable portion of the information obtained by me must unavoidably lie dormant for an indefinite period, possibly until it shall have lost most of its interest and value. My chief consolation under these circumstances is, the consciousness that I have accomplished all that lay in my power, and that others are satisfied that I have done my duty. And I will add that, should the time arrive when I may be at liberty again to turn my attention to my past labours, the remembrance of the reward I have this day received will encourage me to discharge the obligation, which every traveller in distant and unknown countries may be considered to incur.

" To the Council of the Royal Geographical Society I beg leave to return my best thanks for the honourable distinction which they have conferred upon me ; and to yourself, Sir, for the complimentary terms in which you have been pleased to communicate to me the award of the Council."
